

STATE MESSAGING QUICK GUIDE:

Tools for Talking about Your State's Essential Child Care Infrastructure

Using infrastructure language to frame discussions with community leaders about child care as a "public good."



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Pivoting to Rebuilding: Now Is the Time to Invest In Our Essential Child Care Infrastructure

As we turn our focus from emergency child care to building a strong early care system for the future, it is important to frame child care as a fundamental necessity that requires significant and smart investment. The pandemic has opened our eyes to the fact that our child care infrastructure is truly essential to our state’s families and economy. It was not able to fully respond to families and communities before COVID-19 – and much of it collapsed under the pressures of the pandemic.

It’s time to call for a bold commitment to invest in our essential child care infrastructure – so our employment rate recovers quickly, and all our children and families flourish in the long run.

Using infrastructure language frames discussions with community leaders around child care as a “public good.” It’s an analogy that helps prioritize significant financial investment and ongoing analysis of systems and performance in order to support families and the overall state economy. As we advocate for immediate relief to support reopening and for a more long-term focus on supporting working families, we need to pivot to a bold comprehensive demand for a smart, well-funded early care system in our states. Like transportation and electricity, strong child care infrastructure helps families live their fullest lives and fuels economic growth.

Tips for Talking about Our Essential Child Care Infrastructure

DO frame change as a new opportunity to work together to strengthen the essential child care infrastructure that fuels strong families, communities, and states.

DO use family and provider stories. Whenever possible, tell policymakers the stories of families and providers for whom lack of a smart early care infrastructure is holding them back from what they could achieve.

DON’T lead with brokenness, neglect, failed systems, and accusations about past funding. The pandemic has revealed broad bipartisan support for child care, and our long-term success relies on acting on this collective goodwill to move forward.

DO pivot from talking about child care providers to talking about the state’s whole early care system, so leaders learn to think of it as a crucial network of providers, funding streams, and government structures that work together to support parents and develop children.

Sample Talking Points

As we talk about reopening and ultimately reinventing, we must continue to talk about big commitments to investment and re-thinking the way we approach child care at the state level.

- As our state’s leaders consider budget cuts and necessary changes for recovery, they should actually increase investment in essential child care infrastructure, in order to generate both short- and long-term economic gains.
- Child care is essential now — and for our economic recovery when the crisis is over. Yet without significant investment and intervention, our heavily damaged child care infrastructure will become a real obstacle to recovery.
- In addition to funding child care, we also must modernize child care policies to make the system smarter and more supportive for providers and working families.
- Broad access to quality child care allows parents to look for work and start a job or attend school, leading to more equitable labor force participation and lower public services costs in the more immediate term.
- Even before the pandemic, child care was unaffordable for typical families – often costing more than tuition at their state university. Through expanded subsidies and other permanent solutions, we must make sure parents have access to safe, developmentally focused options.
- Child care professionals are the backbone of our essential early care infrastructure – we have to do a better job of acknowledging and enriching their child-development skills, and ensuring they earn enough to avoid living in poverty themselves.
- Investing in high-quality child care infrastructure is a two-generation strategy for our state: we are both supporting parents and making sure children get the strong start that helps them succeed in the future. Two-generation approaches have a multiplier effect that promotes the educational success and economic stability of the whole family.

Sample Social Media Posts

[STATE]’s #childcare infrastructure needs not only an immediate rescue, but also a reimagining to ensure it is a robust, sustainable system that works for all families. #investinchildcare

If [STATE] wants to get parents back to work and still see our kids flourish, then we have to re-engineer our essential #childcare infrastructure. #investinchildcare

As [STATE]’s legislature considers budget cuts to drive recovery, they should at the same time look increasing investment in the state’s child care infrastructure – which is essential for people to go back to work. #investinchildcare

It’s time to make smarter investments in #childcare — and finally bridge parents’ ability to pay to the actual costs of operating a strong program that supports child development. #investinchildcare

Rebuilding our economy STARTS with re-inventing our essential #childcare infrastructure. #investinchildcare

Sample Letter/OP-ED Text

Now is the Time to Invest in [STATE]’s Essential Child Care Infrastructure

Before the pandemic, when we talked about infrastructure, most of us probably imagined bridges, rails, and electrical grids — the public assets that make our daily lives, and our economy, possible. But the recent coronavirus crisis has revealed another crucial structural foundation of our state’s everyday life that most of us probably hadn’t considered: child care.

When the loosely connected network of child care providers was ordered closed (or closed by operators to keep their educators and children safe), numerous essential workers were suddenly unable to report for work. Dual-income families had to choose one of their incomes. People with the skills to help our state recover were unable to report for duty without endangering their children.

In a time when we desperately need thousands of key workers on the front lines, many struggle to get there — because of the missing child care infrastructure. Even before the pandemic, our state’s child care infrastructure was struggling to meet the needs of [STATE]’s families. The existing model saw many working families paying the equivalent of college tuition for child care, while the neediest of families saw limited access to high-quality programs. Even with our state’s subsidy, most of the programs were out of reach.

And providers also faced a virtually impossible economic model – the irreconcilable pressures of keeping tuition low while adequately compensating a professional staff that can deliver the developmental experiences that parents expect.

If [STATE] wants to get parents back to work and still see our kids flourish, then we have to re-engineer our essential child care infrastructure.

That means thinking about the role of the public sector and moving away from a private market model that leaves families and providers to solve the intractable financial challenges of providing and paying for early care on their own. That means thinking about ways to stabilize our state’s child care network, and making sure that center operators and professionals have a viable living. That means significantly upgrading the technology we use for funding, tracking, support, and compliance.

[STATE]’s workforce is ready to go, but they cannot rebuild our state economy without access to affordable, high-quality child care. Investing in our state’s essential child care infrastructure is an urgent component of recovery from the pandemic. But beyond that, the pandemic has shown us that early care is foundational to our states’ strength and economic energy. Smart investment in our state’s child care infrastructure is an investment in economic vitality.

Join me in supporting a new child care infrastructure agenda for our state.

Sample One Pager

[INSERT YOUR LOGO OR A COALITION OF LOGOS]

The Pandemic Has Made It Clear: [STATE]’s Future Depends on Investing in Our Essential Child Care Infrastructure

The pandemic has opened our eyes to the fact that our child care infrastructure is truly essential to our state’s families and economy. It was not able to fully respond to families and communities before COVID-19 – and much of it collapsed under the pressures of the pandemic.

Working together, we have to invest in and strengthen it, so our employment rate recovers quickly, and our children and families flourish in the long run.

We must make early care more affordable. Even before the pandemic child care was unaffordable for typical families.

- [Insert your state’s stats from <https://www.epi.org/child-care-costs-in-the-united-states/> and <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2019/09/16/474487/early-learning-united-states-2019/>]

Through subsidies and other solutions, we have to make sure working parents have access to safe, developmentally focused options.

We must ensure providers and workers have the investment and supports necessary to deliver the enriching experience that parents expect. Our state’s child care providers operate on thin margins. And the workforce we trust to protect and develop our children is among the lowest paid in our state.

- [insert your state’s stats from <http://americaforearlyed.org/resources/state-fact-sheets>].

We have to strengthen the networks, supports, and financial models that are the foundation of the system, so providers can meet the demands for access and quality.

We must continue to emphasize learning and development. A two-generation strategy for child care means that we are both supporting parents and making sure children get the strong start that helps them succeed in the future. We must continue to emphasize environments and practices that help kids thrive.

Many of the mechanisms we need to move forward are already in place. Now it is time to commit – and invest in a strong child care infrastructure for [STATE].

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